News Release

Region 2 - New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

EPA Completes Work at Newark, New Jersey Housing Project to Protect the Community from High Levels of Lead in Soil

650 Tons of Lead-contaminated Soil Removed in $1.4 Million Cleanup to Protect Children from Lead Exposure

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(New York, N.Y. – December 23, 2013) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has completed the removal of lead-contaminated soil from the grounds of the Millard E. Terrell Homes public housing complex in Newark, New Jersey. In December 2012, high levels of lead were found in soil samples collected by the EPA at a playground area within the housing complex. The lead is likely to have come from old industrial facilities that once operated in the area. The EPA has worked over the past year to reduce the potential for people, especially children, to be exposed to soil with high levels of lead.

Lead is a toxic metal that can cause damage to a child's ability to learn and a range of health damage in adults. Lead exposure can have serious, long-term health consequences in adults and children. Even at low levels, lead in children can cause I.Q. deficiencies, reading and learning disabilities, impaired hearing, reduced attention spans, hyperactivity and other behavioral problems. Lead exposure can also cause health problems in pregnant women and harm fetuses.

"Exposure to lead can have lifelong effects on children's health and their development, which is why the EPA took steps to reduce potential exposure to lead in the soil at the housing complex," said Judith A. Enck, EPA Regional Administrator.

The EPA coordinated closely with the Newark Health Department; the Newark Housing Authority; a local community-based organization, the Ironbound Community Corporation; and residents of the Terrell Homes to address this serious threat to children's health.

Beginning in December 2012, the EPA took dozens of soil samples from the playground area of the Terrell Homes, located on Riverview Court in the Ironbound section of Newark, to determine if former industrial activity on the property and nearby had contaminated it. Elevated concentrations of lead were found in the top two feet of soil throughout the playground area. In response, the Newark Housing Authority removed the playground equipment to discourage children from playing in the area. The EPA installed a chain-link fence around the former playground to restrict access to the lead contaminated soil.

During the spring and summer of 2013, the EPA continued to collect soil samples from the unpaved areas of the Terrell Homes property. Subsequent sampling results showed that locations behind the community building extending from the neighboring property line to approximately 25-30 feet onto the Terrell Homes property also had high levels of lead present in the surface soil.

The EPA excavated about 650 tons of soil from the former playground area and the northern property line and filled the area in with clean soil. In addition, the neighboring property owner, 99 Chapel Street Partners, will install a barrier wall along the property line to prevent future movement of lead-contaminated soil from its site from moving onto the Terrell Homes property. Complete restoration of grass, shrubs and trees is planned for spring 2014. Throughout the EPA's work, the community was kept informed via flyers, a Web page, two public meetings and in-person outreach.

The Superfund program operates on the principle that polluters should pay for the cleanups, rather than passing the costs to taxpayers. The cleanup is estimated to cost approximately $1.4 million and has been funded by the EPA to-date. The EPA will seek to recover some of its costs from the parties responsible for the contamination.

For more information about the site and work performed by EPA, please visit: http://www.epa.gov/region2/superfund/removal/barth.

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13-127 # # #